MAKE YOUR BUSINESS GROW. ADVERTISE IN DAWN INDUSTRY SUPPLEMENTS
Call Manager Supplements in Karachi Lahore or Islamabad on UAN: 111-444-777

DAWN

RAISE YOUR COMPANY'S PROFILE. ADVERTISE IN DAWN COUNTRY SUPPLEMENTS
Call Manager Supplements in Karachi Lahore or Islamabad on UAN: 111-444-777

'Inefficiencies' no reason to delay promotion: SC

Court says civil servants should not suffer due to procedural delays, inaction of government departments

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that government-run departments cannot invoke their own administrative inefficiencies and procedural delays as justification for failing to ensure timely promotions.

"Safeguarding an employee's right to be considered for promotion in a timely manner is a right," observed Justice Ayesha A. Malik, adding that the government departments cannot take shelter behind their inefficiencies and inactions by relying on Section 8(3) of the Punjab Civil Servants Act 1974, as they are responsible for ensuring timely promotions.

The observation came in an appeal of Fakhar Majeed before the Supreme Court, which a three-judge bench comprising Justice Ayesha A. Malik, Justice Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar, and Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim had taken up against a February 16, 2024, order of the Punjab Service Tribunal, which had dismissed his plea.

The Supreme Court, however, ordered the Punjab Irrigation Department to grant promotion to the employee from 2012 and held the department responsible for an "unjustified", "negligent", and "inefficient" delay in processing his promotion for over a decade. The petitioner stated that he was entitled to a proforma promotion, effective January 18, 2010, as the vacancy for the post of draftsman (BPS-14) became available on that date.

The department, on the other hand, pleaded that in terms of Section 8 of the Act, the employee did not have any right to seek proforma promotion from the date of vacancy, rather promotion was to be granted with immediate effect.

Petitioner Fakhar Majeed was appointed on Oct 30, 1999, and later promoted to the post of draftsman on current charge basis three times in BPS-10 through letters dated Dec 11, 2008, June 2, 2010, and Nov 12, 2011, for a period not exceeding one year under Rule 10(b) of the Punjab Civil Servants (Appointment & Condition of Services) Rules 1974 or till the arrival of regular incumbent whichever is earlier.

A Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC) was convened in 2012, but his case was not considered. This became the subject matter of a dispute between the parties.

The employee was ultimately recommended for promotion to the post of draftsman by the DPC held on May 4, 2019, and thereafter promoted through an office order of May 7, 2019.

The petitioner claimed that he was not treated fairly and was denied the lawful right of being considered for promotion in 2012. The issue, therefore, is the petitioner's request for regular promotion to the post of draftsman (BPS-14) with effect from Jan 18, 2010.

Authored by Justice Malik, the seven-page judgement observed that it must be remembered that promotion in public service was not a gratuitous benefit, rather it was tied to merit, performance and operational needs of the state.

Once an employee satisfies the prescribed eligibility criteria, a corresponding duty devolves on the competent authority to consider the case, failing which a reasonable timeframe must be documented, Justice Malik observed.

By relying on Section 8(3) of the Act, the department actually tried to nullify the delay, its mismanagement and inefficiency. Fairness, transparency and timeliness in promotion matters are critical to keep employees efficient and motivated, the judgement emphasised.

It said that a delay, failure to convene DPC, or prolonged reliance on current charge or acting arrangements cannot be used to defeat the right of an eligible civil servant to timely consideration for promotion, and that a civil servant cannot be made to suffer for omissions, inefficiency or inaction.

The Supreme Court ruled that the tribunal failed to appreciate the fact that the employee was unjustifiably deprived of the promotion, and set aside the tribunal's order with a direction that the petitioner be deemed promoted with effect from Jan 21, 2012.

NOOR Alhoda (centre), the mother of Abdul Raouf Shaat, mourns his death outside her tent in Khan Yunis. An Israeli air strike killed Shaat and two other journalists a day earlier.—AFP

Rafah crossing with Egypt set to open next week

• Israeli strikes kill five Palestinians in Gaza • Hamas condemns US sanctions on non-government organisations

DAVOS: Gaza's border crossing with Egypt will reopen next week after largely being shut during the Israel-Hamas war, the Palestinian technocrat leader backed by Washington to administer the enclave announced on Thursday.

Ali Shaath made the announcement by video link during an event in Davos hosted by President Donald Trump, who convened a group of leaders to formally launch a "Board of Peace" initially focused on cementing Gaza's ceasefire.

A key unfulfilled element of the ceasefire, brokered by Trump in October, has been the reopening of Gaza's main gateway to the world to allow the entry and exit of Palestinians.

"I am pleased to announce the Rafah crossing will open next week in both directions. For Palestinians in Gaza, Rafah is more than a gate. It is a lifeline and symbol of opportunity," Shaath said.

"Opening Rafah signals that Gaza is no longer closed to the future and to the war," Shaath said.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, which has controlled the Rafah crossing since 2024. The ceasefire deal left Israel in control of more than half of Gaza, including the area that abuts the border crossing. Hamas controls the remainder of the enclave.

Israeli strikes kill five

In the Gaza Strip, health officials said Israeli air strikes on Thursday killed five people in the enclave. There was no immediate Israeli comment on the violence, the latest to fray the October truce accord. Israel has continued to carry out air and artillery strikes in Gaza.

Health officials at Al Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest, said four Palestinians were killed by Israeli tank shelling in the Zeitoun suburb of eastern Gaza City. A fifth person was killed by Israeli fire in Khan Yunis in the south, health officials said.

A day earlier, Israeli fire killed 11 people including two boys and three journalists, health officials said.

On Thursday, Palestinians in Gaza held funerals for the three journalists, who press advocates said had been using a drone to film tents housing displaced people.

US sanctions on NGOs

Hamas on Thursday condemned as "unjust" a move by the United States to sanction Palestinian associations which Washington accused of having links to the movement.

The US on Wednesday imposed sanctions on six nonprofit organisations working in the Gaza Strip, which the Treasury Department said "claim to provide medical care to Palestinian civilians but in fact support the military wing of Hamas".

It also announced sanctions on a group of Palestinians involved in civilian flotillas that aim to break Israel's sea blockade on Gaza to bring in humanitarian aid.

The Treasury Department said the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad has been "a main organiser" of the flotillas and charged that it was "clandestinely acting on behalf of Hamas".

"We view these decisions as unjust and oppressive," Hamas said in a statement, suggesting the sanctions were incited by Israel as a fight against the Palestinian "national cause".

All the organisations were accused of "secret ties to Hamas" in the US Treasury statement. The sanctions will block any assets the groups have in the United States and criminalise transactions with them.

Hamas called on Washington to walk back its decision.—Agencies

Gunman at large after three killed in Australia

SYDNEY: Australian police said they were hunting for a gunman on the run after three people were shot and killed on Thursday in a small, lakeside town in the country's east.

Officers warned people to stay indoors in the country town of Lake Cargelligo, 450 kilometres (280 miles) west of Sydney.

New South Wales police said they found a man and woman dead in a vehicle after responding to reports of shots being fired in the town in the late afternoon.

A second shooting soon afterwards killed a woman and wounded a man who was reported to be in a "critical condition" in hospital.

"At this stage, police have identified an offender who is still at large," said Andrew Holland, New South Wales police assistant commissioner.

"We have a large search in the area currently underway. We are requesting that people remain indoors," he told reporters.

The gunman is believed to have fled in a vehicle, Holland said.

Police declined to comment on the relationship between the gunman and the victims or any possible motive for the shooting.

A report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* said one of the victims was believed to be the gunman's former partner, describing the incident as a suspected domestic violence attack.

Police said the shooting would worry many residents of the country town, which has a population of about 1,400 people.

"Any death in a small country town is confronting, but again, a scene where you have people shot by firearms is obviously going to make people very, very tense and very concerned," said Holland.

"The scene faced by the emergency services officers at that time would have been horrendous."—AFP

PTI seeks withdrawal of asset secrecy bill

NA passes Income Tax Third Amendment Bill

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: PTI MNA Asad Qaiser, while speaking in the National Assembly on Thursday, raised objections to the bill ensuring the secrecy of lawmakers' assets passed a day earlier, saying parliamentarians were not above ordinary citizens. He announced PTI's dissociation from the bill and sought its withdrawal.

Under Section 137 of the Elections Act, all members of parliament and provincial assemblies are required to submit to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), on or before Dec 31 each year, a statement of their assets and liabilities, including those of their spouses and dependent children. Section 138 of the Act requires the ECP to publish these declarations in the official gazette.

The proposed amendment to Section 138 seeks to insert a proviso stating: "Provided that the Speaker of the concerned Assembly or, as the case may be, the Chairman of the Senate may, on an application made by a member and for reasons to be recorded in writing, by a ruling delivered in the chamber, determine that the statement of assets and liabilities of that member shall not be published publicly by the Commission if such publication would pose a serious threat to the life or safety of the member or, as the case may be, his family, for a period not exceeding one year at a time and subject to the condition that a complete and true statement of assets and liabilities shall be submitted confidentially to the Election Commission."

Tax bill

On Thursday, the House also passed the Income Tax Third Amendment Bill 2025, moved by Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani, who said it aimed to safeguard taxpayers' rights and strengthen the Alternate Dispute Resolution Committee.

The National Assembly was informed that billions of dollars in investment had been attracted through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). Parliamentary Affairs Minister Tariq Fazal Chaudhry said investments had come across multiple sectors, supported by initiatives such as the investment policy and revised visa policy. Minister of State Bilal Azhar Kayani added that the SIFC functioned as a single window to promote investment and transparency.

Furthermore, seven new bills were laid before the assembly for consideration. These included the National Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Authority Bill, the National Archives Amendment Bill, 2026, and the Abandoned Properties Management Amendment Bill, 2026.

With additional input from APP

Bangladesh begins campaigns for first post-Hasina elections

• BNP vows to create jobs for 'millions of unemployed youth', support women's economic independence • Jamaat pledges to clamp down on corruption

SYLHET: Bangladesh began official campaigning on Thursday for the hugely anticipated general elections next month, the first since the 2024 uprising ended the autocratic rule of Sheikh Hasina.

Tens of thousands of flag-waving supporters of key frontrunner Tarique Rahman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) crowded the streets of the northern city of Sylhet, chanting his name.

"We have liberated the country from autocratic rule," prime ministerial hopeful Rahman, who returned to Bangladesh in December after 17 years in exile, told crowds of BNP loyalists. "Now we must establish the rights of the people." Rahman vowed to create jobs for "millions of unemployed youth" and support women's economic independence.

Key rival Jamaat-i-Islami began its campaign in the capital Dhaka, after being crushed during Hasina's 15 years in power.

Jamaat's leader Shafiqur Rahman said he wanted to clamp down on corruption and build a nation where "people from all races, religions and communities will be treated equally".

Among the sea of Jamaat supporters was Kakoli Akter, 36, who said it was the first election rally she had ever attended.

Although eligible to vote since 2008, she said this would be the first time she would cast a ballot, as she could finally support the party of her choice.

"We came here to pray for the party," she said.

The South Asian nation votes on February 12 to elect 350 lawmakers, polls that will bring in new leadership after prolonged turmoil following the ouster of Hasina's government, reshaping domestic politics and regional dynamics.

It comes against the backdrop of insecurity — including the murder last month of a student leader of the anti-Hasina protests — as well as warnings of a "flood" of online disinformation.

'Progress of reform'

Rahman, 60, better known in Bangladesh as Tarique Zia, assumed leadership of the BNP following the death of his mother, former prime minister Khaleda Zia, who died in December at the age of 80. Bangladesh has a significant Sufi following, and the BNP's Rahman followed tradition to launch his campaigns in Sylhet, home to the centuries-old shrine of Shah Jalal.

The National Citizen Party (NCP), formed by student leaders who spearheaded the uprising, now allied with Jamaat, launched their campaign with its chief Nahid Islam urging voters to "carry forward the progress of reform".

Muhammad Yunus, the 85-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who returned from exile in August 2024 at the behest of protesters to lead a caretaker government as "chief adviser", will step down after the polls.

Yunus said he inherited a "completely broken" political system, and championed a reform charter he argues is vital to prevent a return to authoritarian rule, with a referendum on the changes to be held on the same day as polling.—AFP

Iran warns 'finger on trigger' as Trump claims Tehran wants talks

• Iran's top commander says forces are 'more prepared than ever' • Trump calls end to Russia-Ukraine war after 'positive' meeting with Zelensky
• Washington claims permanent Greenland access is secured; Danish PM denies talks on island's sovereignty

PARIS : The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards warned Washington on Thursday that his force has its "finger on the trigger" following mass protests, even as US President Donald Trump insisted the Islamic Republic appears ready for negotiations.

Gen Mohammad Pakpour, the Guards' commander, cautioned Israel and the United States "to avoid any miscalculations by learning from historical experiences and what they learned in the 12-day imposed war".

"The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and dear Iran have their finger on the trigger, more prepared than ever, ready to carry out the orders and measures of the supreme commander-in-chief [Khamenei] — a leader dearer than their own lives," Pakpour said in a statement quoted by state television.

While the prospect of immediate American action against Tehran appeared to recede this week, tensions remain high. Addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos, Trump said the US struck Iranian uranium enrichment sites last year to prevent Tehran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

"Can't let that happen," Trump said. "And Iran does want to talk, and we'll talk."

Gen Ali Abdollahi Aliabadi, who leads the Iranian joint command headquarters, warned that if the US attacks, "all US interests, bases and centres of influence" would become "legitimate targets".

Trump had on Tuesday warned Iran's leaders the US would "wipe them off the face of this earth" if there was any attack on his life in response to a strike targeting Khamenei.

UKRAINE'S President Volodymyr Zelensky and US President Donald Trump shake hands during their meeting in Davos.—AFP

The warnings come as Iranian leadership faces the aftermath of protests that began in late December. A violent crackdown has quelled the movement, accompanied by what the monitor NetBlocks called a "national kill-switch" internet blackout now in its second week. Iranian authorities on Wednesday released their first official toll from recent protests, stating 3,117 people were killed.

Trump-Zelensky meeting

Separately, Trump declared that Russia's war on Kyiv "has to end" after holding a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Davos on Thursday. Following the discussion, Zelensky reported progress on peace talk negotiations and discussions regarding air defence supplies.

When asked by reporters what his message was for Russian President Vladimir Putin — who is scheduled to meet with a US envoy in Moscow later — Trump was direct.

"This war has to end," Trump said. He described the encounter with the Ukrainian leader as positive.

Zelensky characterised the talks with his US counterpart as "productive". Writing on the social media platform X, he indicated that diplomatic efforts between the two nations are intensifying.

Greenland deal

Meanwhile, Trump said he had secured total and permanent US access to Greenland in a deal with Nato, whose head said allies would have to step up their commitment to Arctic security to ward off threats from Russia and China. The development came as Trump backed off tariff threats and dismissed seizing Greenland by force, reducing tension in transatlantic relations.

"It's really being negotiated now, the details of it," Trump told *Fox Business Network* from the World Economic Forum. Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte told *Reuters* in Davos it's now up to senior commanders to handle extra security details.

"I have no doubt we can do this quite fast. Certainly I would hope for 2026, I hope even early in 2026," he said.

While the news triggered a rebound in European markets, officials remain cautious. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen clarified that while security talks are progressing, no negotiations occurred regarding sovereignty over the semi-autonomous territory.

"It is still a difficult and serious situation, but progress has also been made in the sense that we have now got things where they need to be. Namely that we can discuss how we promote common security in the Arctic region," Frederiksen said.—Agencies

Printed at Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Khalil Mohsin and published for Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Shahjahan at Haroon House, Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Road, Karachi. EDITOR: ZAFFAR ABBAS